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ABSTRACT

This study of student activism as a campus phenomenon analyzed over 200 major incidents of college student activism. Most of the incidents were associated with racial struggle, women's concerns or gay liberation activities. These represent what have been called "cultural wars," "campus wars," "identity wars," or "multicultural unrest." Five cases were selected for in-depth analysis: the Mills College (California) Strike of 1990 (concerning changing the institution's all women status), the Chicano Studies Movement at the University of California (Los Angeles) in 1993, gay rights demonstrations at Pennsylvania State University from 1991 to 1993, African American student resistance at Rutgers University (New Jersey) in 1995, and financial aid protests involving Native American students at Michigan State University from 1994 to 1996. The study involved document analysis, site visits, and interviews with key informants. Each incident is described and analyzed for its wider implications. Each of these incidents was found to represent a message from students in defined minority status regarding the broader society. The paper concludes that contemporary student activism revolves around "identify politics" and is part of a larger social movement framed around the ideals of multiculturalism. (Contains 77 references.) (JLS)

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**STUDENT ACTIVISM AS AN AGENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE:
A Phenomenological Analysis of Contemporary Campus Unrest**

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Introduction

In the 1990s, American higher education has witnessed a renewed interest in student activism as a new generation of politically minded students has emerged (Levine and Hirsch, 1991). After nearly two decades of relative silence and a heavy orientation towards careerism as well as apathy, passion once again began to stir in the hearts and souls of students--at least in some of them (Loeb 1994). As Shannon McMackin proclaimed in her graduation speech to the women of Mills College only days after they had claimed victory and preserved the college's 138-year tradition of women's education, "Emotion is not a weak quality. It's passion and passion more than logic leads to change."

Certainly, career-minded students are still the majority. And for sure the "slacker" image of Generation X applies to many (Sacks 1996). But amidst what is easily the most diverse group of college students in U.S. history there has emerged a sizeable group of students concerned with social change who may be seen to constitute a multicultural student movement.

Julie Batz, a 1985 graduate of Mills College who assisted students as a facilitator during the Mills College strike of 1990, offered the following explanation of the changing student Zeitgeist: "When I was at Mills in the late 1980s, student activism was beginning to be stirred by the divestment movement and apartheid in South Africa. All that was emerging in the late 1980s and it kind of introduced a whole new generation of student activists." And Jorge Mancillas, a professor at the University of California at Los Angeles who participated

in the Chicano Studies hunger strike of 1993, offered a similar assessment: "I really sense a mood shift among students in this country that leads me to believe that the Chicano Studies movement is one small step in a larger social movement that's gonna unfold over the years. . . It was a small part in a larger process which hasn't unfolded fully yet."

Today's student activists are a stark contrast to the vast majority of the silent voices of the late-1970s and 1980s many of whom rode the tide of Reaganomics in search of a high paying career, a house, and their very own BMW. Certainly, apathy and acquiescence are still quite pervasive. However, amidst an ocean of apathy there exists an advancing wave of discontent. The following examples of recent campus organizing are offered as evidence of the growing activist quality inherent in contemporary student culture.

On March 14, 1996 college students around the country joined in what was known as the National Day of Action. Thousands of students participated in rallies, pickets, teach-ins, vigils, and marches in defense of access to education, immigrants' rights, affirmative action and in opposition to what has become a toxic atmosphere toward students, people of color, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. Students pointed to H.R 2128, which could overturn decades of Supreme Court rulings on affirmative action, anti-immigrant and affirmative action legislation in states such as California, threats to higher education in the form of proposed cuts to the Department of Education and Americorps, and various state initiatives aimed at limiting the rights of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, as evidence of the widespread intolerance and xenophobia. Using electronic mail to get the word out, the Center for Campus Organizing in Cambridge, Massachusetts played a pivotal role in what turned out to be a highly successful day and follow-up "Week of Action" (March 27 - April 2).

In addition to National Day of Action, other events in the spring of 1996 were also telling. In Corvallis, Oregon nearly 2,000 students marched on the campus of Oregon State University demonstrating against a series of racist incidents that had recently occurred on the campus including the defacing of Anita Hill posters with racial slurs. One day earlier students from the University of California at San Diego held a demonstration aimed at defeating the anti-affirmative action legislation being pushed through the California legislative process some of which had already been adopted by the University of California system. Their efforts were part of a larger state-wide plan of action as students took to the offensive in countering hostility directed at minorities disguised in the form of the California Civil Rights initiative (Proposition 209). Approximately 300 students participated in a march that ended when 18 students were arrested for overtaking the intersection at La Jolla Village Drive in San Diego. "I'm doing this because I think people need to find out what's going on," stated UC San Diego undergraduate president Naomi Falk as she was handcuffed and pushed into a police van. "I hope a lot of people are paying attention." Earlier in the day, Greg Akili of the San Diego Equal Opportunity Coalition spoke to a crowd of about 700, which was described by the administration as the most emotional and militant protest in 15 years. "Say no to these attempts to dictate that we can only have one kind of society with one kind of people," shouted Akili (Clark 1996, 1-2).

Campus organizations around the country joined their UC San Diego and OSU peers. Students from several DC colleges and universities including Howard University and George Washington University combined forces to lead a demonstration at House Republican leader Newt Gingrich's Washington, DC apartment in protest of what they perceived as unfair

scapegoating of minorities and immigrants. Students from the Coalition for Economic Justice at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill held a speak out on campus and mini-demonstrations at several places in Chapel Hill including the office of Jesse Helms. Members of MIT's Committee for Social Justice, Mujeres Latinas, Hunger Action Group, Amnesty International, and South-Asian American Students organized a week of consciousness raising culminating in a rally aimed at countering racism, homophobia, sexism, and anti-immigration sentiment.

Also in the spring of 1996, approximately 100 Columbia University students occupied Hamilton Hall, the university's main administration building, demanding that President George Rupp institute a Department of Ethnic Studies. About 50 additional students rallied outside. The demonstration at Hamilton Hall was a show of support for four other students who had entered the 10th day of a hunger strike. Five days later and after at least a dozen arrests, students walked out of Hamilton Hall arm in arm chanting "What do we want? Ethnic Studies! When do we want it? Now!" And, "The students united will never be defeated!" Later in the same day, the two-week long hunger strike ended after extensive negotiations in which a compromise position was reached: The university agreed to commit to the creation of a Latino and Asian American studies program with the help of a blue ribbon panel to search for qualified faculty. This was short of the students vision of a Department of Ethnic Studies expressed in their "Ethnic Studies Manifesto":

We believe that Columbia University's recent commitment to the establishment of Asian American and Latino Studies programs is shortsighted and naive. We

call on the administrative and intellectual leadership of Columbia to acknowledge that the future development of curricular, theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of Ethnic Studies can only be nurtured and sustained by the creation of a Department of Ethnic Studies. . . . Only with departmental status can such fields of study be insured centrality in the curriculum. Only with a department will Columbia be able to attract leading scholars and ensure that tenure be evaluated internally and not subject to the politics of other departments. . . . Only a Department of Ethnic Studies will insure Columbia's place at the forefront of academia.

A variety of causes have drawn students to activism during the 1990s. For example, around the country students at hundreds of colleges and universities held candlelight vigils and demonstrations demanding the re-trial of death-row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal, sentenced for the 1981 killing of a Philadelphia police officer despite the conflicting testimony of key witnesses. City University of New York students organized multiple rallies to protest ongoing tuition hikes. At the University of Texas students held demonstrations and teach-ins to protest the elimination of affirmative action throughout the University of Texas system. In an episode that brought to mind the Rodney King beating, students at the Claremont Colleges protested the mistreatment of illegal immigrants at the hands of the Riverside Sheriff's department. Student activists at Harvard University effectively scuttled a \$ 1 million contract between the university and Pepsi because of the company's ties to forced labor in Burma. The latter example of student activism was part of a much larger movement known as the

Free Burma Coalition (FBC), which by January of 1997 had spread to nearly 200 campuses around the country and had originated through the internet efforts of a Wisconsin graduate student and Burmese exile known to his supporters as "Zarni." In using the internet as the primary organizational tool, Zarni likened himself to an "air-traffic controller hooking up concerned individuals and similar groups who are isolated from one another. You can see the community emerging from the internet." Zarni explained that FBC drew its inspiration from an Ethiopian proverb: "When spiders unite they can tie down a lion."

Although campus activism has returned in a significant way, today's direct action efforts have not drawn the same kind of media frenzy that student efforts of the 1960s drew. In part, this is due to the fact that the 1960s had three or four overarching themes to student activism and perhaps made for a more interesting story line. While the 1960s had the peace, free speech, civil rights, and the women's movements to give coherence to the many cases of campus unrest and direct action (Carden 1974; Gitlin 1987; Heineman 1993; Lipset 1976; Lipset and Altbach 1967; Sampson 1970; Woodward 1974), themes are not so readily available when describing student activism in the 1990s. There is however one social fiber connecting many but certainly not all examples of contemporary student activism--the struggle of marginalized students to attain what they perceive as equal opportunity and social justice. This struggle is often discussed in terms of "identity politics" and arguably is tied to ongoing efforts to build a multicultural democracy (Giroux 1992; hooks 1992, 1994; Author 1994, 1997; Author and Valadez 1996; Tierney 1993; West 1993).

In this article, I argue that contemporary student activism primarily revolves around what may be termed "identity politics" and is part of a larger social movement framed

around the ideals of multiculturalism. Furthermore, I argue that the current multicultural movement has its roots in the broad civil rights movement of the 1960s, including the struggle of women, gays, and racial minorities such as African Americans and Chicanos.

In what follows, I provide a brief overview of student activism from the 1960s to the present. I highlight the role the divestment movement of the 1980s played in igniting contemporary student activism. Following the historical overview, I delineate the methodology employed in conducting this study. I then introduce my findings by providing a brief summary of each case of student activism. I go on to discuss the interconnections among these five cases and draw conclusions about contemporary campus life, democracy, and multiculturalism.

Overview of Student Activism: The 1960s to the Present

Although student activism as a campus phenomenon dates back to the early days of the colonial and frontier colleges (Moore 1978; Novak 1977), the 1960s is the decade one typically looks to when thinking about American student activism (Foster and Long 1970; Jencks and Riesman 1968; Lipset 1976; Lipset and Altbach 1967). And while other decades such as the 1930s had their share of campus activism (Altbach and Peterson 1971), clearly the 1960s is the high water mark for student direct action in the United States.

What is confusing about the 1960s is getting a handle on the level of student involvement in activism. One is often left with media-produced images of every student in the country engaged in political and social unrest when in fact the actual percentage of students who became involved in campus protest movements is relatively small (Baird 1970;

Campus 1965; Peterson 1965). Perhaps too much attention has been focused on some of the images conveyed by the media which tended to transpose the happenings at Kent State, Berkeley, Columbia, and Jackson State across all colleges and universities during the decade of the 1960s. Seymour Martin Lipset and Philip Altbach argued this very point: "The scope of the American student 'revolution' has been greatly exaggerated by the mass media, which have seized upon dramatic forms of student political activity and have devoted substantial attention to them" (1967, 200).

Getting a handle on the extent of student participation in campus activism is more difficult than assessing some of the key social movements of the period that helped to stimulate a good deal of the campus unrest in the 1960s. For example, various scholars have pointed out that student participation in southern civil rights activities such as voter registration drives in the early summers of the 1960s contributed to a new generation of progressive minded students well schooled in the tactics of civil disobedience (Evans 1980; McAdam 1988; Lipset and Altbach 1967). Upon returning to their northern and western campuses, they soon transported resistance techniques to the college context and student culture began to take on a more radical tone. Thus, the activism of the 1960s was in many ways born of student involvement in civil rights demonstrations and out of a concern for racial equality (Obear 1970). Of course, the ongoing war in Southeast Asia, the counter culture movement, and the massification of higher education all played parts in creating a complex cultural maize that became a decade of discontent and direct action.

As campus activism peaked in May of 1970 with the U.S. invasion of Cambodia and the killings of four students at Kent State, a new decade opened and a period of relative calm

began to unfurl like a blanket of fog over the American college campus. With the end of the Vietnam War in sight and administrative concessions to student free speech and student rights won on many of the larger campus fronts, student group-mindedness fell into a kind of somber as the pursuit of more individualistic goals began to take precedence. The 1970s was a decade for rebels without a cause who often turned to marijuana as an outlet for their drowsy discontent. The students were still concerned about the social good but the passion that flowed in the 1960s was lacking. This was the decade of disco, polyester, the Bee Gees, John Travolta, Saturday Night Fever, Saturday Night Live, and Saturday night specials. As Bob Dylan had warned a decade before, "The times they are a changin'" and in the 1970s, they certainly did.

That the students of the 1970s tended to withdraw from social and political issues is hardly surprising. After all, these students had witnessed the U.S. involvement in a war that in the end made little sense even to the die hard hawks. It was this decade that brought us the Watergate fiasco in which an entire generation of youth witnessed the acceptability of the President of our own country breaking the law and getting away with it. As Arthur Levine (1980) noted, the 1970s was a period of tremendous pessimism as revealed by some student thoughts he collected in his research of college and university life: government doesn't give a damn; all politicians are crooks; Nixon was like all of us, only he got caught; Nixon was a victim, that's all; and I don't trust government as far as I can throw the capital building. Clearly, it seemed to be a decade in which the means came to justify the ends and the ends seemed to be more in line with personal success than the general social good. With all that the students of the 1970s witnessed, it is hard to find fault with their logic.

The 1980s seemed to pick up where the 1970s left off, although disco faded away as New Wave, Progressive Rock, and Rap took over the charts. But in the mid-1980s, things began to change. If there was one significant issue that served as a catalyst for contemporary student activism it was the divestment movement of the 1980s. Around the country students at universities such as Columbia organized protests in an effort to force institutional divestment in South Africa (Hirsch 1990; Loeb 1994; Vellela 1988). This movement became particularly powerful during the mid 1980s as political activity by Blacks in South Africa increased to such a point that the South African government declared a state of emergency. As state repression increased, so did world-wide media coverage, which in turn inspired student protests and shanty towns at colleges that heretofore had rarely seen any signs of student activism. Ultimately, the divestment movement at schools such as Columbia and the University of Kansas and elsewhere achieved significant results and a renewed sense of student vitality and political organizing was resuscitated.

Other issues such as CIA involvement in foreign affairs surfaced from time to time, but concerns about South Africa more or less shaped the tenor for student activism in the 1980s and paved the way for campus activism in the 1990s. In their analysis of the post-sixties transformation, Philip Altbach and Robert Cohen commented that, "It can be argued that the 1980s have been a kind of transitional period between the extraordinary quiet of the 1970s to a more active period in the future" (1990, 38). The divestment movement may have been more than merely a transitional stage, it was a likely catalyst for the multicultural movement that would come to epitomize the 1990s.

Methodology

The goal of this research study is to advance a phenomenological understanding of contemporary student activism (Husserl 1970; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Schutz 1970). To accomplish such a goal, I chose case study methodology as a means of data collection (Yin 1989). The early challenge of this study was to select representative cases that might yield phenomenological understandings of contemporary student activism as a social movement. In order to select such cases, one must first have some knowledge or information about the scope of the phenomenon. Thus, a first step in developing a helpful sample of case studies was to get some idea of the terrain of student activism in the 1990s. This was accomplished through an analysis of reported cases of student activism as described in campus, local, regional, and national newspapers, which were accessed through the internet. Obviously, such a strategy has its shortcomings but nonetheless is a practical way to get a "layout of the land."

After an extensive search, over 200 major incidents of student activism were identified. These incidents were then analyzed to identify possible themes. The vast majority of campus incidents (over 80%) were associated with racial struggle, women's concerns, or gay liberation activities and represent what some recent scholars have described both affectionately and pejoratively as "cultural wars," "campus wars," "multicultural unrest," or "identity politics" (Author 1994, 1995; Arthur and Shapiro 1995; D'Souza 1991; Sidel 1995; Tierney 1993). The majority of the remaining examples of student activism concerned environmental issues or political controversies in foreign countries such as Burma.

After identifying key themes of contemporary student activism, the next step was to

select various cases for in-depth study. Accordingly, I selected five cases which cover some of the key identity struggles identified in the broader analysis. These cases are: the Mills College strike of 1990, the Chicano Studies Movement at UCLA in 1993, gay rights demonstrations at Pennsylvania State University from 1991 to 1993, African American student resistance at Rutgers University in 1995, and financial aid protests involving Native American students at Michigan State University from 1994 to 1996.

In collecting data at the various sites, I relied on data collection tools commonly recommended in conducting qualitative research (Fetterman 1989; Yin 1989). Specifically, data collection involved over 100 formal and informal interviews with students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community members. The collection of documents such as memos, letters, newspaper articles and editorials were some of the key items obtained. Also, artifacts such as films and audio recordings of campus incidents and student organizing efforts were collected. For the most part, the case studies were retrospective in that the incidents studied had already occurred. Thus, my primary concern was reconstructing a phenomenological account of the events by focusing on various examples of student organizing and campus demonstration. Interpretation of the case studies involved coming to terms with the complex meanings campus constituents gave to the various events and student activities (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Each site was visited at least two times within a two-year period. The first visit took place in year 1 of the study and involved establishing initial contact and identifying key informants. Although some interviews occurred during year 1, the majority of interviews were conducted during the second site visit and after I had achieved greater familiarity with

the specific case of student activism and the key participants involved. Students who had already graduated were contacted through their alumni office and most were interviewed over the telephone. In a few cases, I was able to conduct face-to-face interviews with alumni.

The formal interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts along with the documents and field notes from observations formed the body of data to be analyzed. In analyzing the data, I employed content analysis (Patton 1980) as I sought to identify themes related to the following research questions: What theoretical understandings may be advanced by observing the way in which contemporary student activists organize themselves? How does participation in campus activism contribute to students' conceptions of democracy and social change? What can we learn from student activists that might contribute to reframing higher education?

Findings

Obviously, there have been hundreds of cases of campus activism that could be used to highlight the multicultural quality of contemporary activism. However, decisions had to be made and therefore I selected five cases to further advance understanding of multicultural student organizing. The number one criterion used in selecting the following five cases was a concern to represent a range of diverse groups and their struggles. Because of the number and variety of diverse student groups engaged in direct action, it was impossible to represent all groups in this study. With the preceding in mind, I turn to a discussion of five cases of student activism.

"Strong Women, Proud Women"

As the last decade of the twentieth century opened, nowhere was the power of direct action more vivid than in the spring of 1990 on the campus of a small liberal arts college nestled in the hills of west Oakland. The demonstrations at Mills College in many ways epitomized the power of the student body to influence campus policies and to bring issues into the public's consciousness. Through their use of the media, the women of Mills College were able to capture the national spotlight and bring attention to the relevance of women-centered education.

The most significant event in campus organizing at Mills College was a two-week long strike that effectively shut down the administrative operations of the entire campus. Within hours following the official announcement by President Mary Metz and Board Chair Warren Hellman that the college would begin admitting undergraduate men in the fall of 1991, the students had blockaded every administrative entrance at the college. The next two weeks witnessed a media barrage as the students' story was televised throughout the country and around the world and included an appearance by Mills women on the Phil Donohue Show. Throughout the strike, posters appeared around the campus depicting a woman standing tall, with arms raised to the sky at the moment of victory. Written on the posters were the words, "Strong women, proud women." This simple statement became the students mantra and the driving vision behind their commitment to preserving a women's space in higher education.

Not long into the strike, the students gained the support of Mills College alumnae around the country. Some offered to increase their giving to the college if it remained an

all-women's institution. Others threatened to have the college cut out of their wills. Faculty also came out in support of the students as the pressure on the Board to reverse its decision mounted with each day of the strike. In the end, the pressure was too much to bear and it became apparent that the Board had underestimated the students' commitment to women's education and identity.

For the women at Mills College, their struggle to maintain the college's tradition as an all-women's institution was part of the larger struggle to create equal opportunity for women. For Silja Talvi, who played the key role in teaching the women of Mills College the tactics of civil disobedience, their struggle was a rejection of traditional management strategies that tended to ignore a more relational and connected human pulse. As Talvi explained, "Things don't always have to be top-down, hierarchical. . . . I don't believe in governing power structures. I don't believe that decisions can be made by a few for the many. I believe in community and what's best for the community." For Talvi, democracy in its truest sense is quite compatible with campus decision making. She recognized that such a system is slow, cumbersome, and inefficient, but as she explained, "What's the alternative? My god, you have these horrible people making decisions for the rest of us. Look at how people suffer in our country. It's absurd." For Talvi, the decision of the Mills College Board of Trustees was one more example of a few ruling the many. It was not a decision she could or would accept. At least not without a fight.

Students such as Talvi spoke fondly of the advantages for women at Mills--advantages that these women believed would enable them not only to compete in a male-dominated society, but to change it. One alumnus commented, "Mills provides a setting where women

are more apt to take risks. They're more apt to speak out in class. They're more apt to take leadership roles. I just think that it really prepares women to go out in the world and do what they want to do. It's a four-year kind of haven."

Two weeks after the students began their boycott of classes and their encampment of the administrative buildings the strike was winding down. The mood was euphoric as students expressed confidence that the board, which was scheduled to meet on May 18, would reverse itself. About 200 students gathered on the grassy lawn of Toyon Meadow in anticipation of their victory. The laughter throughout the campus told of their relief. "We are victorious," proclaimed one of the student leaders, Anna Stravato, as she addressed the crowd. "We have made our point. This strike is a dam stemming the tide of closings of women's colleges across the country." Stravato closed by linking their actions to the larger struggle for women's rights and equal opportunity. "Our struggle will not end with this strike. It goes on into next week, next year and until all women of every kind are represented equally in this society" (Curtis 1990, 1).

"We're Here. We're Queer. Get Used to It."

In October of 1992, Craig Waldo stood on the outside steps of Pennsylvania State University's school auditorium and fought off years of tears and the pain of "the closet." The event was part of National Coming Out Day and Waldo was there to share his experiences with an audience of roughly 200 students. "Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people have two choices: Come out or stay in your closet and continue hating yourself. Coming out is better than hating yourself. . . . It's about celebrating yourself." Waldo was one of the

leaders of the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Student Alliance (LGBSA), a group of politically minded students engaged in ongoing pressure to force the university to add a sexual orientation clause to the university's official statement of non-discrimination.

For nearly two years the students staged a variety of public events and held open meetings as a means to address the university's policy. Their fight with the university was of course much deeper than simply a matter of gaining equal protection. Indeed, they were engaged in what some writers describe as the postmodern struggle for identity whereby marginalized groups attempt to gain legitimacy within the culture of a particular society (Gergen 1991; Sampson 1989). For students such as Waldo, coming out was not simply an individual act of identifying with one's same-sex attractions; it was about claiming a public identity and becoming visible.

Despite the possible harassment students face by coming out, researchers have generally argued that coming out is a primary step in the development of a positive lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity (Cass 1979; Coleman 1982; Troiden 1979, 1989). As one student explained, "Every person I've ever come out to has made me feel like a major weight has been taken off my shoulders each time I tell someone. The weight is really everyone's expectations of what I should be, a heterosexual. But when I come out to them the weight or burden is removed." And a second student added, "Coming out involves taking all the negative things that you've heard about yourself, heard about 'those people,' and just saying to yourself that none of it matters as much as you do." For individuals who think of themselves as queer, coming out is a step in becoming engaged in the struggle against a politics of silencing that seeks to render difference invisible.

In embracing queer identity as part of coming out, many of the gay students at Penn State followed in the footsteps of Queer Nation and adopted their organizational motto: "We're here. We're queer. Get used to it." Arguably, college campuses of the 1990s were witnessing a new breed of gay activists whose commitment to political and cultural struggle would become for many the center of their collegiate experience (D'Augelli 1991; Author 1994). The political and cultural goal of queer students generally speaking has been to create a campus and public sphere free of heterosexism and homophobia. As one student argued, "Heterosexual culture is very set on making gay and lesbian people invisible, whether they use physical violence or institutional violence. Coming out is a way of battling back."

One of the key events planned by queer activists at Penn State was one they never had to carry out. Their plan was to conduct a sit-in of the president's office with the goal of attracting national attention to what they perceived as discriminatory policies of the university. The administration at Penn State had a long history of resisting gay liberation efforts and in the past such resistance had blown up in their face. For example, in the early 1970s the university banned the first gay organization--Homophiles of Penn State (HOPS)--only to be sued by them. Ultimately, the case was settled out of court and the student group reinstated as an official student organization. HOPS was the forerunner of LGBSA and students were keenly aware of the history of their organization and the history of the university's resistance. Ultimately, members of the Board of Trustees in an effort to stave off negative publicity as well as respond affirmatively to Faculty Senate pressure voted to adopt the clause and add "sexual orientation" to the official statement of non-discrimination.

"Immigrants in Our Own Land"

One year after Craig Waldo stood on the steps of Penn State's Schwab Auditorium, Marcos Aguilar began a hunger strike along with five other students and one faculty member as they demanded the creation of a Chicana/o Studies Department at UCLA. For over twenty years, UCLA had half-heartedly supported a Chicano Studies interdepartmental program only to see its viability called into question on an almost yearly basis. Chicana/o students felt the program needed to be strengthened and granting it departmental status with the authority to hire and promote its own faculty was a way to ensure its survival. Two weeks before the hunger strike, Marcos Aguilar had been among the 90 students and community members arrested for their participation in a sit-in at the UCLA Faculty Center. The arrests and the treatment they received at the hands of the university and Los Angeles Police Department only served to increase their passion to achieve departmental status for Chicana/o Studies. These students saw Chicana/o Studies as a link between an elite institution and a city comprised of the largest Mexican American population in the country. Building a strong department was not simply a battle over who decides curricular matters; their fight was part of a larger effort to improve the place of Mexican Americans and enable them to connect to a rich culture and history that had been silenced for too long.

For Aguilar and Minnie Ferguson, two key players in the Chicano Studies movement, they had grown weary of feeling like strangers in a region of the country their ancestors had first settled. In the words of Jimmy Santiago Baca's (1979) famous poem, Aguilar and Ferguson had come to feel like "immigrants in our own land." Thus, their battle with Chancellor Charles Young, the primary opponent of elevating Chicano studies to

departmental status, was more than a mere reflection of what courses do or do not get offered. Like their queer brothers and sisters at Penn State, as well as others whose lives were framed by the democratic diaspora so central to the multicultural student movement, they were engaged in a cultural war to gain legitimacy within a society that preferred they remain silent.

Leo Estrada, a key faculty member who helped to negotiate a compromise and the creation of the César Chávez Center for Interdisciplinary Instruction in Chicana and Chicano Studies, saw the struggle of today's Chicano students as similar to what Blacks went through a decade or two prior in their quest to connect to their African roots. For Estrada, and others, the challenge today's Chicana/o students face is one tied to establishing a firm sense of cultural identity. What has emerged is the realization among many of the young that one's identity as a Chicana/o cannot be divorced from one's cultural heritage. It is what some have described as "Chicanismo"--a form of racial/ethnic nationalism with an emphasis on cultural consciousness and heritage (Gómez-Quíñones 1990; San Miguel 1996). Interest in the past and a commitment to community is evident in the rise of Mexican American student organizations such as MEChA (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán*) whose roots are firmly planted in the late 1960s as revealed through founding documents such as *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (Chicano Coordinating Council 1970), which challenged Chicana/o students and faculty to create Chicano Studies programs at every California state university.

The Chicano Studies movement at UCLA offers evidence of the growing cultural identity commitments of Chicanas/os and represents a return to the identity politics that many of their parents embraced with the early founding of organizations such as MEChA.

Comments from contemporary Chicana/o activists at UCLA confirm such an analysis:

"Chicana/o Studies gives us intellectual space. . . . We're always fighting for our history and culture in an elitist institution such as UCLA. It's about empowering our people. . . . Basically, we are fighting for our own space in one of the most prestigious institutions in the United States."

"Genetic, Hereditary Background"

In the midst of the 1960s a rising tide of Black pride began to infiltrate the civil rights movement. The teachings of African American leaders such as Marcus Garvey in the 1920s, Elijah Muhammed in the 1950s, and Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael in the 1960s, gained influence as the seeds of race pride and nationalism took root. For these individuals, "Black Power" had significant implications for the struggle of the American Negro: "It includes race pride, an interest in the history of the American Negro and his past in Africa, and a desire to educate the black American in the acceptance of black as something good, not bad; and beautiful, not something of which to be ashamed" (Grant 1968, 426).

A central concern of the Black Power movement was gaining control over the education of American Negroes and fostering the kind of learning context where African American identity could be advanced. Rutgers University and the Black Resistance movement (McCormick 1990) became a central quality of the institution's identity and a key aspect of the collegiate experience for many African American students at Rutgers. Pride in one's identity as an African American had become critical to students of the 1990s and Rutgers was seen as one university where students could pursue African American identity

less burdened by organizational norms framed by White superiority.

Whatever sense of security and freedom for identity exploration African American students felt they had achieved at Rutgers became precarious in the spring of 1995 when three devastating words were spoken by President Francis Lawrence. In attempting to explain the university's admission strategy to a group of faculty at the Camden branch, Lawrence made the following remarks: ". . . the average S.A.T.'s for African Americans is 750. Do we set standards in the future so we don't admit anybody? Or do we deal with a disadvantaged population that doesn't have that genetic, hereditary background to have a higher average?"

At first, none of the faculty in attendance were struck by the President's comments. It was only after a tape of his presentation was re-played nearly three months later, that people took offense. In fact, it was Tuesday, January 31 when *The Star-Ledger* of Newark published a front-page story detailing the comments from President Lawrence based on an audio tape the paper had received from the American Association of University Professors.

The stage was set for a near fatal blow to be delivered to Black racial pride. After 30 years of preaching, teaching, and reaching, African Americans at the university found themselves confronted by racial denigration once again. The year was 1995 but it seemed more like 1955. A historic moment had arrived and the students could not watch it pass them by. If ever there was a time for direct action, the time had come. For Clarence Tokley, who was finishing up his second year at Rutgers, as well as for other African American students at the university, it was a matter of doing what was right. "It was something seeing all those people pulling together no matter what might happen. We were

there because we knew what we had to do. We had that feeling of knowing people and being together. . . . We were going after what we knew was right. And doing it no matter what. No matter whether President Lawrence apologized or not. Or whether the faculty backed us or not. The students were together. When it came down to it we had to do our work and we did it."

Students sought to call national attention to the remarks of the President at the same time that they demanded his resignation. What they were getting were a variety of explanations for a "slip of the tongue," none of which was satisfactory to them. In a dramatic form of student demonstration Jacqueline Williams, a junior at Rutgers, walked onto the basketball court at half-time of the Rutgers-University of Massachusetts Atlantic 10 basketball game in an effort to begin a sit-in and ultimately force the game's postponement. Williams had arrived late to the game expecting to see a student demonstration already in progress. Much to her dismay, she arrived at a relatively calm basketball arena. Sensing an opportunity about to fade into the night, Williams took it upon herself to launch the sit-in, not knowing whether anyone would join her or not. "I had missed my train from Newark so I got there when half-time was about to start. When I saw there was no demonstration going on I got kind of frustrated, so I decided to take it upon myself, to just stop the game." University officials gathered around Williams and tried to coax her into leaving. She offered them only one comment: "I will leave when President Lawrence leaves."

Other students, mostly African Americans, soon joined Williams at half-court and the game eventually was postponed. The event attracted the media's attention and brought Lawrence's comments to a national audience. Other student demonstrations followed the

basketball sit-in but in the end President Lawrence remained at Rutgers although concessions were offered as a means to boost the university's commitment to students of color.

"Promises Made. Promises Kept."

"Columbus was lost; so is Engler" yelled a group of Native American students gathered at the Capitol for a March 1995 rally in Lansing, Michigan. On the eve of the Republican primary, a large contingent of college students, many of whom attended Michigan State University, had organized the demonstration to pressure Republican Governor John Engler to reconsider his plan to end the state's tuition program for Native Americans. The Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver Program (MITWP) had evolved over the years from the Comstock Agreement of 1934--a long standing treaty between the state and its Indian population in which a school and some land in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan was exchanged for free education for Native Americans throughout the state. Cognizant of the waiver's history, students held signs reading "Give us the waiver or give us the land" and "Honor your commitment."

From Engler's perspective, while the waiver may have been historically tied to the Comstock Agreement, it was ultimately connected to legislative actions in the 1970s which sought to interpret Comstock (Michigan Public Acts 174 and 505). Thus, for Engler, overturning the tuition waiver was not in violation of the treaty but instead was simply an act of rethinking the 1970s legislation. Fitting the conservative rhetoric that helped Proposition 209 pass in California, Engler argued that the MITWP was in effect an "entitlement program" that excluded other underrepresented peoples and therefore should be eliminated.

The March rally at the Capital was only one event in a series of student demonstrations that would last throughout two consecutive academic years, from 1994 to 1996. The whole ordeal would leave Michigan State University students such as Lula Brewer and Grace Lonewolf disillusioned about the possibility of improving the lives of their people. Brewer, who in 1995-96 was a junior majoring in Studio Art and English, fought off the tears as she talked about how much the waiver meant to her and her family. "Because I am the oldest grandchild in my family, my cousins look up to me. And the thing is that if they take the waiver away, my cousins will not have a way to go to college. . . . I think most people will just feel like college is not for them. College is too much trouble. They don't have the resources without the waiver." And Lonewolf, a sophomore studying marketing during the 1995-96 school year, saw the tuition waiver as a key aspect of improving the educational attainment of Native Americans. Without such programs, she believed the tribes will continue to suffer economically. For Lula Brewer and Grace Lonewolf, Governor Engler's assault on the waiver program was one more example of legislative betrayal by people who sign treaties and then forsake them at the state or federal government's convenience.

A number of campus demonstrations on the part of Native American students followed their rally at the Capital, including interruption of MSU's fall homecoming parade and Governor Engler's homecoming speech. "Promises made, promises kept," was the phrase they chanted during the homecoming festivities and at another demonstration a few days later as they protested Columbus Day. On this occasion, about 30 students and staff dressed in black gathered around the "rock" located at the center of MSU's campus and

together commiserated the "discovery of the new continent." One by one they spoke of the despair that the day had come to signify for their lives and for the Native American population. Pat Dyer-Deckrow, a graduate student and staff member in MSU's Native American Institute, commented, "This is not a celebration day for us. We have always been here and we resent the idea of discovery and the myth of the virgin land." Michael Tunte, a senior majoring in landscape architecture, added, "The story of Columbus discovering the 'New World' looks all pretty from the outside--then, when you break the surface, there's so much more that people don't want to talk about, but you can't deny it" (Madgeviski 1995, 1).

For Native American students at Michigan State University, their battle with Governor John Engler was a taxing experience that raised questions and doubts in their own minds about the place they wanted to play and the price they were willing to pay to obtain a college education and achieve what they perceived as social mobility and educational opportunity. As Engler attempted to close the doors on them, bi-partisan support came in the form of State Representatives who effectively challenged the Governor's efforts. As a new academic year opened in the fall of 1996, the students could once again count on the tuition waiver program. And yet in the back of their minds they wondered what new strategy the Governor might try this year.

Interpreting the Multicultural Student Movement

The actions of students such as Silja Talvi, Craig Waldo, Marcos Aguilar, Grace Lonewolf, and Jacqueline Williams have put many colleges and universities on alert that student activism is alive and well in the 1990s. The politics of identity continues to be

played out everyday on campuses around the country. Sometimes it breaks out in a full-blown case of student unrest such as those witnessed at Mills College, Penn State, UCLA, Rutgers, and Michigan State. At other times, its subtleties remain hidden and circumscribe classrooms, residence halls, and lockerooms. Identity matters are always present but they become an issue only when the most marginalized make it so. What are we to make of this powerful collegiate trend that I have described as the "multicultural student movement"?

"Martyrs for Multiculturalism" was the *Newsweek* headline that went on to describe the case of UCLA and Chicano Studies (Leslie and Murr 1993). The Chicana/o students involved in the conflict however did not see their struggle as part a multicultural movement. For them, it was a matter of creating a place for Chicanos in the broader society by being included in the curriculum and within UCLA's power structures. And few Native American students at Michigan State saw their struggle as part of any larger multicultural movement--they simply wanted what was coming to them. Likewise, African American student resistance at Rutgers was not about multicultural pride--it was about African American pride. Taken as individual cases, it is hard to see the diversity of student demonstrations as a multicultural movement. However, when one examines the case of UCLA along with those of Penn State, Mills College, and countless other examples in which identity politics are at the center of campus conflict, it becomes clear that the effort to build a multicultural society through the university forms the heart of this interconnected social movement.

There is, of course, another interpretation of today's campus unrest and the identity politics that get played out on an almost daily basis. For many conservatives and traditionalists, identity politics mark the decline of the canon and the rich traditions of

education that have sought to ground students in a common experience and common understandings of Western culture. For conservative writers such as Dinesh D'Souza (1991), campus unrest is not about democracy playing itself out--it is about chaos and fragmentation. Students, from this perspective, are spurred on by faculty too deeply embedded in the relativism of multiculturalism, deconstructivism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, feminism, Marxism, gay/lesbian studies, and ethnic studies. According to the "traditionalists," as Barry Sarchett explained, many of today's faculty are part of a "conspiratorial group of academic barbarians marching under various profane banners. . . storming the barricades of Truth, Reason, Beauty, Western Civilization, and other capitalized self-evidently 'transcendental' or 'universal' Values" (1995, 19).

Western thought has taught us much, but not all of it has been beneficial to equality and social justice. As Audre Lord pointed out, much of Western thinking conditions people to see things in terms of simple oppositions: good versus bad, dominant versus subordinate, up versus down, superior versus inferior: "In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior. Within this society, that group is made up of Black and Third World people, working-class people, older people, and women" (1995, 191). It is institutional marginality enacted through the a variety of postsecondary educational mechanisms such as control of the curriculum, decisions about educational access, the governance and regulation of campus life, and the allocation of resources which profoundly effects the lives of the dehumanized in American society. When the Mills College women shut down the college,

they were saying that they wanted a voice in institutional decisions affecting their lives. When African American students at Rutgers University forced the postponement of a basketball game, they expressed their desire to represent African American identity at Rutgers in an empowering way. When Chicana/o students at UCLA fasted for nearly two weeks, they wanted the world to know that a university education ought to include discussions of Chicana/o culture and heritage and that students ought to have some say in how the curriculum is shaped.

It should come as no surprise that college and university settings highlight so much of the cultural tension inherent in our society. After all, because education plays such a key role in fostering and enhancing a democratic citizenry, as John Dewey's (1916) work reminds us, it seems logical that many of the social tensions of the democratic project will get played out in campus life (Barlow 1991). And, as Ruth Sidel argued, "The educational system is . . . of central importance in determining who will be able to participate fully and meaningfully in our democratic society" (1994, 25).

In his book *Generation at the Crossroads*, Paul Loeb talked about identity politics and contemporary students: "Organizing around common racial or sexual identity can anchor students in common experience and history. It can help them challenge the myths that all Americans begin with equal chances. It can unearth the pain of wanting to succeed while knowing that it might mean having to leave behind family, friends, and community" (1994, 362). Loeb went on to warn that an exclusionary form of student identity politics, in which Blacks only speak to Blacks, or Puerto Ricans only speak to Spanish-speaking students, is damaging to the democratic vision. When student interaction is limited to intra-group

conversations, how can social transformation requiring real communication be achieved? Organizing around cultural identities may be necessary for social change but identities nonetheless ought to remain a flexible space enabling border crossing and dialogue across differences (Astin, 1992, 1993; Burbules and Rice 1991; Giroux 1992; Hurtado 1992; Hurtado, Dey, and Treviño 1994; Tierney 1993; Author 1994, 1997).

Peter McLaren (1995) spoke to issues of democracy and diversity when he argued that identities formed around difference or sameness ought not be the end of social struggle but instead should be seen as a piece of the complex democratic project. It is a simplistic and an essentialist form of logic to see identity as autonomous, self-contained, and self-directed as if we are not interwoven into some larger and highly interactive social matrix. From McLaren's perspective, democracy should not be seen as a seamless, smooth or harmonious project. Forming identities around diversity is not the goal but rather "diversity must be affirmed within a politics of cultural criticism and a commitment to social justice" (126). In other words, students need to recognize that cultural differences do exist and that such differences contribute a great deal to the kinds of social experiences they have. At the same time, such differences must not be positioned as barriers to building connections in the larger struggle for social justice, which necessarily involves students joining together to embrace common concerns such as a vision of a democracy and freedom (Author 1997; Barber, 1992; Battistoni, 1985; Bellah 1985; Etzioni, 1995; Mendel-Reyes 1995).

Conclusion

The multicultural tenor of contemporary student activism has significant implications

for how we think about higher education and the role of students as reformers. A message is being sent by contemporary students to college and university faculty, administrators, and policy makers. We need to pay heed to the message and interact with student activists through caring and compassionate dialogues without being too quick to dismiss their passionate stances. When students are willing to risk their lives in order that they may take courses that speak to their cultural experiences, we need to listen to the serious commitment and desire to shape their own educational experiences. Is not this kind of passion an expression of involvement in learning?

Democracy is the great American project that gets played out in a variety of organizational contexts, and educational institutions are certainly not immune to democratic struggle. The civil rights movement of the 1960s, along with other social movements encompassing women's concerns and gay liberation paved the way for the role of students in advancing freedom and social justice. The 1990s has witnessed a return to the democratic passions of the 1960s as students have enacted sophisticated political and cultural strategies through the use of the internet and the media as means to advance their identity agendas. The issue faced by policy makers involves more than simply answering the question: How should we respond to student organizing and demonstration? Instead, faculty, administrators, and policy members need to engage diverse students in ongoing dialogues that may bring about fundamental changes in the structures that shape college and university life. From retention research, to studies of campus climate, the evidence is fairly clear: American higher education is failing many of its most diverse students. The multicultural student movement discussed in this paper represents students' efforts to address our failings.

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